

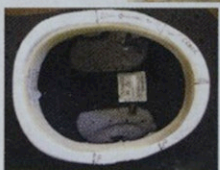
Manufacturer tests Townend's Kentucky hat

FOLLOWING Oliver Townend's serious fall at the Rolex Kentucky three-day event in April, riding hat manufacturer Champion is reminding riders that a helmet should be replaced after every fall, even if it looks undamaged.

Oliver broke his collarbone, four ribs, sternum and shoulder in the fall. Despite these injuries and his head being squashed between the full weight of his horse Ashdale Cruise Master and a wooden pole, the only visible damage to his Champion Ventair helmet was a slight scuff.

But, analysing the hat, Champion found its polystyrene liner had been crushed from 21 to 13mm.

Jenny Doran of Champion explained: "Such damage would severely compromise the hat's ability to do its job, since [the crushed polystyrene] will not offer the same protection."



After his horror fall, the lining of Oliver Townend's hat (left) was severely crushed

Claire Williams of the British Equestrian Trade Association said a good rule of thumb is to change your helmet if you see stars during a fall — or worse still, if you can't remember it.

"A riding hat's foam interior is made of thousands of bubbles.

These bubbles absorb the impact of the fall by bursting. Once they've gone, they've gone," she said.

And she advises stricter limits: "If your hat has suffered a severe impact, even a drop from the top tackroom shelf, it should be thrown away. If you are in any doubt at all, replace it. It's not worth the risk."

Oliver changes his hat every time he falls off, though admits it is "easier" for him to do so, being sponsored by Champion.

But, he added: "All riders should change their hats if they land on their heads."

In the US, where riding hats are less popular than in the UK, a pro-hard hat campaign has been launched following dressage rider Courtney King-Dye's accident in March. She is making a good recovery from severe head injuries caused by falling without a helmet.

➤ *See next week's H&H to see our shocking findings testing hats at one show.*